



MINUTES

MERCHANTVILLE JOINT LAND USE BOARD

Borough Hall Council Chambers
1 West Maple Avenue, Merchantville, NJ 08109
Tuesday, October 22, 2019, 7:30pm

1. **CALL TO ORDER.** Mr. Lammey called the meeting to order.
2. **OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT.** Mr. Lammey recited how the meeting is being held in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act.
3. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE AND MOMENT OF SILENCE.** All persons present stood for pledge of allegiance and conducted moment of silence.
4. **ROLL CALL.** Ms. Wuebker took roll call.

<u>Class IV</u>	<u>Class IV</u>	<u>Class I</u>	<u>Class IV</u>	<u>Class III</u>	<u>Class IV</u>	<u>Class IV</u>	<u>Class IV</u>	<u>Class IV</u>	<u>Class IV</u>	<u>Class II</u>
Benjamin	Brennan	DeSimone	Fiume	Fitzgerald	Lammey	Licata	Stewart	Uricchio	Woods	Wuebker
			Present	Present	Present				Present	Present

Mr. Madden, the Board Attorney, and Mr. Hanson, the Board Engineer, were also present.

5. OLD BUSINESS

Approval of Meeting Minutes - Mr. Fitzgerald made a motion to adopt the September 10, 2019 meeting minutes as proposed. Mr. Fiume seconded the motion. Mr. Fitzgerald, Mr. Fiume, and Ms. Wuebker voted in favor of the motion. Mr. Woods abstained from the vote, given his partial absence at the last prior meeting.

Borough Council Resolution R19-80. This matter is tabled to a future meeting. Ms. Wuebker will continue to work on zoning recommendations with the Board's professionals.

6. NEW BUSINESS

Master Plan Reexamination Report.

Mr. Lammey asked Ms. Wuebker to initiate the discussion. Ms. Wuebker distributed a Summary of Initial Draft of Reexamination Report to Board members. She explained that this is a working draft to begin discussion of the reexam. Board members should feel free to provide their opinions on topics and to provide any suggested changes, deletions, or additions.

She explained that the Master Plan was adopted in 2007. The Master Plan is a policy document to guide local decision making and regulations. The statutory requirements for a Reexam include identifying major problems and objectives at the time of adoption, the extent they've increased or reduced, and any significant changes in assumptions or policies. It also includes any specific recommendations for Master Plan or development regulations changes, and whether redevelopment plans should be considered incorporated into land use plan element.

She went over the major land use issues that were identified at the last master plan and summarized her opinions with regard to the statutory requirements. 'Downtown revitalization' is still a goal. There is an on-going effort to redevelop the underutilized triangle. There has been a change in basic assumptions since 2007 that makes downtown revitalization more challenging. E-commerce has made it more challenging for traditional retail to be successful and there is a diminished demand for office space. It is expected that technology will impact circulation and transportation needs in the future. The goals still hold true: The Borough still wants to encourage a greater mix of land uses and activities in downtown; still wants to capitalize on community character, enhance sense of place, pedestrian-friendly nature, etc. However, while the Master Plan talks about wanting to encourage retail and services on first floor of buildings to create synergy and street level activity, the Borough also doesn't want to force the creation of new retail construction if the market will not support it. Though requiring retail on first floor is well-intended, some first floor storefronts on mixed-use buildings in other communities are sitting empty because the market can't support it. Merchantville has a small resident base.

With regard to downtown revitalization regulation recommendations, Ms. Wuebker discussed various recommendations last month; she thinks the Borough should eliminate the site plan review process for every change of permitted use. Merchantville has established older buildings with limited or no opportunity for parking or exterior changes. The site plan requirement is a change of use and economic development deterrent. Mr. Lammey noted that at the last meeting, it seemed that the Board was leaning towards still wanting to retain site plan review for certain uses, like restaurants as they have potential for nuisance issues, such as garbage, odors, etc.

There was a discussion about how the 'retail of services and goods' category is too broad now; need to further clarify that category. It is less scary to eliminate the site plan requirement for every permitted use, if the ordinance is more specific about what is considered a desired, uncontroversial 'no brainer' use vs. those that need more review on an individual basis, based on their potential impact. That way desired uses only need a zoning permit. Whereas those that need more thought based on the particular circumstances, are still captured as conditional uses. Ms. Wuebker also mentioned that Borough recently attempted to relax the sign ordinance, but need to clarify some of the ambiguous terms. Also, the HPC has been hampered from approving some desired signage based on the specific restrictions in the ordinance. They do not have authority to grant variances. There are some changes that should also be considered that would not negatively affect historic character or sign clutter.

There was a discussion about incorporating the 2008 Redevelopment Plan Amendment which reduced the allowable height of buildings into the Land Use Plan Element, but not yet include the 2016 Redevelopment Plan Amendment because it is likely it will need to be amended soon. Also, in order to effectuate redevelopment, the Borough still needs to acquire 17 E Park Avenue. The utility poles along East Park Avenue should also be relocated in order to widen the road. A Board member suggested that utilities be put underground.

'Harmonizing New Construction with Merchantville's Small Town Charm and Historic Character' is still an objective for the Borough. However, the perceived problem appears to be reduced now that the maximum allowable building height has been reduced, and there have been other redevelopment projects that have come to fruition in other towns that have mitigated concerns about change. The Redeveloper is proposing to keep the former PNC Bank, which is consistent with what is recommended in Master Plan. However, the PNC Bank has deteriorated significantly due to the roof condition – it has been raining inside the building. It may no longer be practically feasible to do so – so that would be a changed assumption.

With regard to adequate parking in downtown, it continues to be challenging to meet some people's convenience expectations when they want parking spaces right in front of their destination. A Board member asked about parking for the proposed redevelopment. Board members discussed a shift in thinking about cars and parking, especially with millennials. The 2007 Master Plan recommended an updated parking study. User restrictions, time limitations, and signage affected usability. Ms. Wuebker thinks the ordinance should specifically allow shared parking. There was a discussion about the Residential Site Improvement Standards. The ordinance needs to be updated to reflect RSIS which controls statewide. Also, need to implement more parking management strategies. In locations with low occupancy rates, it's a parking management problem. Ms. Wuebker believes the target car space occupancy rate is 85%. Ms. Wuebker suggests removing some of the restricted yellow curbing on the southern side of Maple and consider eliminating the meters on the south side as well— this will provide more opportunities for long term parking within a reasonable walking distance of downtown, while not affecting the most convenient downtown parking spaces that need turn over. There was also a discussion about potential changes on Chestnut Avenue to provide more parking opportunities. A circulation/parking study is recommended.

'West Maple Neighborhood Stabilization and Revitalization' is still a continuing objective. While some progress, still challenges. Mr. Madden asked about the recommendations for incorporating the West Maple Redevelopment and Rehabilitation Plan and the Multi-Municipal Plans into the Land Use Plan Element. He was concerned about the latter because the planning board hasn't seen them. Ms. Wuebker will provide them to Board members for consideration. She explained that no plan has been prepared yet for the properties recently declared to be in need of redevelopment/rehabilitation in the west end in 2017, but that can be a recommendation in the Report.

For the Chapel Avenue and Centre Street Circle Area, the gateway has improved in recent years, particularly when the two houses were demolished in Pennsauken. No significant changes in assumptions. Community resilience was added for discussion to the plan, as that has been raised in a questionnaire from the State.

Mr. Lammey asked whether any Board members had any other land use issues that they think should be included in the Reexam. None at this time. He explained that the matter is going to be continued until the next meeting to see give more time for review and discussion by the full Board. It is anticipated that a public hearing will occur at the December 10th meeting.

7. PROFESSIONAL COMMENTS

Escrow Releases - the Borough's CFO asked Ms. Wuebker to have the Applicants escrow releases be approved by the Board. Board members stated that they did not feel comfortable because they do not feel they are in the position to determine whether an escrow release would be appropriate. There was a brief discussion about what other towns do for this matter. The Board professionals expressed they didn't feel there is a need to have it on the agenda as a discussion item, as don't want to create any unnecessary paperwork or spend time on it. Mr. Fitzpatrick is going to talk to Ms. Moules to ask for more information about it.

8. ADJOURNMENT Mr. Fiume made a motion to adjourn the meeting that was seconded by Mr. Fitzpatrick. All those present voted in favor of it. The Board adjourned at approximately 9:15 pm.